

CENTENNIAL BARN

Constructed: 1872

Address: 651 North 200 East (rear)

Present owners: Bruce/Dinah Webb

Historically the Mormon concept of tithing was interpreted to mean that each church member should contribute one-tenth of all future “increase.” Most of these contributions were in kind and required extensive storage facilities.

Lehi’s first tithing office, a sixteen-by-twenty-four-foot, two-story, adobe building with basement and surrounding mud wall, was erected at 344 West Main in 1854. The surrounding tithing yard, which occupied one-sixth of Block 37, eventually had a large hay barn, four stables, extensive corrals, and an adobe granary.

Approximately one-third of tithing donations were retained locally. Under supervision of the bishop, these funds were used to provide for the poor, maintain church facilities, and to finance projects that would benefit the entire community. The other two-thirds was sent to the General Tithing Office in Salt Lake City.

Lehi’s tithing office, like other church and school buildings in the town, was used for a multitude of public functions. City council meetings, elections, and dances were frequently held there.

For hundreds of Lehi patriots on 4 July 1876, the tithing yard became venerated as the site of most of the American Centennial celebration activities. Sporting events were held there during the afternoon. Ice cream was first introduced to Lehi under the shade of the towering black willow trees on the property.

The spacious tithing hay barn was the scene of an afternoon dance for children and an evening dance for their elders. The large lumber barn, built in 1872 for a feed and livery stable, originally stood north of the Utah Southern Railroad Depot (approximately where I-15 now crosses Second East). After the railroad was completed to American Fork in 1873, Lehi business declined.

Consequently, the local ward bought the barn, disassembled it, and moved it to the tithing office yard where it was reconstructed.

Community dances in 1876 Lehi were usually held in the Lehi Music Hall. But arrangements could not be made to hold the Centennial celebration there, so committeemen fixed up the tithing barn for the festivities. Red pine logs, cut in the Boulder Mountains west of Rush Valley, were hauled to Cedar Fort and sawed into lumber. These thick, rough planks were then laid crosswise on sleeper beams of West Canyon timber, and a dance floor was ready. The barn was then bedecked with cedar boughs, flowers, bunting, flags, pictures, and monos. “To say that it looked beautiful,” wrote Andrew Fjeld, “is putting it mildly for it looked like a veritable fairy palace.” Other community events were also held in the barn which citizens thereafter called Centennial Hall.

Foot races, ice cream eating, and barn dancing were not the only events held on the tithing lot that long-ago Independence Day. When the evening skies darkened, the first fireworks ever exploded in Lehi were set off. The unsuspecting crowd was startled by the bursting rockets. “[People] surged from one side of the tithing lot to the other like a herd of wild cattle in a stampede,” Andres Fjeld later noted. “No one was hurt for the fire did not fall” and “all together the day was a glorious success from start to finish.”

After Thomas R. Cutler replaced Bishop David Evans in 1879, one of the first official acts was to relocate the tithing yard near his house. Accordingly, Lehi’s second tithing yard became situated on the northwest corner of Sixth North and Second East.

The historic tithing barn downtown was moved to the new yard where a major portion still stands behind the Bruce Webb home. An 1898 Sanborn Map of this tithing yard shows, in addition to the barn and office/granary, two large corrals, three log stables, a flowing well with pump, an outhouse, a root cellar with dirt roof, and weigh scales.